

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (currently amended) A process to obtain a fleshed pelt using saline water, said process comprising the steps of:

- i) treating raw hides/skins with not less than 300% w/v of saline water having ~~sodium chloride concentration in the range of 11000 to 30000 ppm~~ of chlorides ~~by not less than 300% w/v~~; in the presence of ~~salt~~ by not less than 0.04%w/v of salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal, either individually or in any combination thereof, for a period of not less than 12 ~~in the range of 10 hrs to 14 hours~~ to obtain soaked hides/skins,
- ii) treating the soaked hides/skins with not less than 2% w/w of alkali metal ~~by not less than 2% w/w~~ in combination with ~~saline water~~ by not more than 200% w/v of saline water for a period ~~in the range of~~ not less than 6 hours ~~to 48 hours~~, and
- iii) fleshing the treated hides/skins of step (ii) to obtain the fleshed pelt.

Claim 2 (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the ~~sodium chloride concentration of~~ saline water has a sodium chloride concentration of more than 25000 ppm. ~~is in the range of 11000 to 30000 ppm.~~

Claim 3 (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt ~~is selected from~~ ~~from the group consisting of~~ in step (i) is a salt of an alkali metal ~~and an alkali earth metal~~.

Claim 4 (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt of the alkali

metal alkali ~~metals used~~ is selected from the group consisting of sodium hydroxide, sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate ~~either individually or in~~ and combinations thereof.

Claim 5 (currently amended) A process, as claimed in claim 9 ~~1~~, wherein the salt of ~~the alkali~~ alkaline earth metals is selected from the group consisting of calcium hydroxide, magnesium hydroxide and ~~either individually or in~~ combinations thereof.

Claim 6 (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the skin/hides are obtained from animals.

Claim 7 (previously presented) A process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the animals selected are from the group consisting of a cow, goat, sheep and buffalo.

Claim 8 (currently amended) A process as claimed in claim 1, ~~wherein comprising treating the~~ wherein comprising treating the fleshed pelt ~~is used for preparing the~~ to prepare a finished leather.

Claim 9 (new). A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the salt in step (i) is a salt of an alkaline earth metal.

Claim 10 (new). In a process for obtaining a fleshed pelt comprising the steps of (i) soaking a raw hide/skin in water for a time effective to promote sufficient rehydration of the hide/skin to facilitate the subsequent removal of non-collagenous material from the rehydrated hide/skin, (ii)

treating the rehydrated hide/skin with sufficient alkali to swell protein in the rehydrated hide/skin whereby to facilitate removal of the non-collagenous material, and (iii) fleshing the hide/skin treated in step (ii) to obtain the fleshed pelt, the improvement wherein the raw hide/skin is soaked in step (i) in saline water having a salinity of more than 25000 ppm in the presence of a salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal before the hide/skin is treated with the alkali in step (ii), wherein the hide/skin is soaked in step (i) in not less than 300% w/v of the saline water in the presence of not less than 0.04 w/v of the salt of the alkali metal or alkaline earth metal.

Claim 11 (new). A process as claimed in claim 9, wherein the rehydrated hide/skin is treated in step (ii) with not less than 2% w/w of the alkali in combination with not more than 200%w/v of the saline water for a period of not less than 6 hours.

Claim 12 (new). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the salt is a salt of an alkali metal selected from the group consisting of sodium hydroxide, sodium carbonate, sodium bicarbonate and combinations thereof.

Claim 13 (new). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the salt is a salt of an alkaline earth metal selected from the group consisting of calcium hydroxide, magnesium hydroxide and combinations thereof.

Claim 14 (new). A process as claimed in claim 11, further comprising treating the fleshed pelt with operations including tanning to prepare a finished leather.

Claim 15 (new). A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the skin/hide is from a cow, goat, sheep or buffalo.